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STEREO: ULTRABLACK OF MUSIC AND BAUDRILLARD

NONMUSIC BAUDRILLARD, CLICKS & CUTS, STEREO, TECHNOLOGY, ULTRABLACK OF MUSIC

Today, the metastasis of musical production, circulation and technology makes music always available and collapses any distinction between background and foreground music. Music simulates a vital activity, is omnipresent and thus hyper-audible. Music is administered as a permanent drone and thus also becomes inaudible again. There is a scenario of music, sounds and noises that you don't necessarily have to listen to. The noise generated by radio, the internet and smartphones, which is subtly integrated into everyday routines by invisible transformers, drives music and the system, according to Baudrillard, beyond its own end, so that there is simply no reason to listen to or perceive music any more. For Baudrillard, hi-fi music is already associated with a purging of sounds and the apparent liberation from noise and degenerates into integral music. Flawlessly merging into its own model, music liberates itself from music precisely by restoring the sound to technical perfection. This technical perfection means that an artificial noise is added to the signal to make it more musical again. Therein lies the danger of glitch music, which merely modulates frequencies, exploits errors and corrupts signals

Where does the stereo effect begin, the point at which hi-fi becomes so uselessly refined that the music is lost in the obsession with its fidelity? Where is the point at which the social becomes so uselessly refined that it itself goes stereo and is lost in the obsession for safety? Today, obsession, at least according to Baudrillard, leads us away from this technicality, this truthfulness, completely away from music. It creates a false destiny for music, just as it creates a false destiny for the social – to see its fulfillment simply as a matter of perfect execution.

Baudrillard's point is that there is a point in the evolution of stereo from which increasing refinement of reproduction no longer improves the quality of music, but degrades it. According to every possible technical definition of musical quality, the standard gets better and better.

Baudrillard's critics would rightly accuse him of a certain nostalgia: The quality he laments as lost to stereo never existed in reality. But it is precisely this tautology, this self-definition – the fact that the only criterion for musical quality in relation to stereo is stereo itself – that Baudrillard disputes here. It is not so much an actual quality that he claims has been lost – in which case his critics would be right – but a kind of virtuality that is excluded by any possible definition. It exists only within language, the power of language to speak of a point that is real beyond any possible verification. It is the language that is the limit of the real, that is able to propose a limit for systems that have no limit in the real and that are even the very definition of what is real (today it is the stereo that defines reality, the fidelity of music). It is language, which has no image, no possibility of being represented, which is at the same time the limit of all systems of representation and which ensures that everything can be represented.

Baudrillard plays in this example – and throughout his work – with the paradox that two things that resemble each other too much cease to resemble each other at all. As the reproduction of music – the stereo – becomes closer and closer to the original, the relationship between them becomes weaker and weaker: it becomes harder and harder to tell what is the original and what is the copy, or to see any connection between them at all. This is the limit of representation that Baudrillard speaks of: the fact that something in the original will always resist reproduction, or that the original and the copy can only resemble each other insofar as they are different. This rule is the basis of maximalism: it implies that there is always a limit to any system that explains the world, that there is always a difference between any system and the world. But if on the one hand this is a description of something real, as if we could actually hear the difference between the original and the copy when they get too close, on the other hand it is a mere rule. In no way could we ever hear that difference: It is only that which cannot be represented in the original. And yet we speak of the difference between the original and the copy as if we could say how it is that the original is larger than the copy, how it is that something is missing in its reproduction. This is the split logic of maximalist statements: on the one hand, they speak of the limits of systems that seem to have no limits, of what is excluded from stereo, for example, to ensure that only stereo is the definition of stereo. On the other hand – and here Baudrillard's critics are right, there is a nostalgia in Baudrillard's work, but it is a necessary nostalgia – they must themselves repeat the same logic, must claim to be able to speak of what is excluded from this other system, must try to become more all-inclusive than the system they criticize for trying to become too all-inclusive. The paradox of maximalizing hypotheses is that in order to speak against all attempts to speak for the unrepresentable, they must themselves speak for that unrepresentable; they must attempt to represent the unrepresentable.

To speak for the unrepresentable, in the NON-concept of Ultrablack of Music, is to speak for the outside. The outside has many names: the disruption, the contingent, the void, the silence, the unexpected, the accidental, the collapse, the catastrophe. But we also have protective barriers made up of habits that help us navigate an uncertain world—that is the purpose of Guattari's ritornello, that short whistle that is meant to remind us of the familiar, even when we travel to foreign lands. It is the non-ritornello that leads us to the outside.

On the other hand, against Baudrillard, it is to be asked whether the outside cannot seep into technology and its perfection itself, as Sohn-Rethel has tried to depict with his “ideal of the broken.” However, Sohn-Rethel capitalizes this only on the anarchic use of technology, without asking what it means that the more complex the machine becomes, the more likely it is to be a machine that can be seized by disturbances. This is what Clicks & Cuts is about.

translated by deepL.

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